

NEWS IN brief

Top Islamist killed in US air strike

BBC ONLINE

A top Islamist militant who ordered a deadly attack on an Algerian gas plant two years ago has been killed in a US air strike in Libya, officials say. Mokhtar Belmokhtar was killed in the eastern city of Ajdabiya, a statement from Libya's government said. The US says Belmokhtar was targeted and the strike was successful, but it is assessing the operation's results and would give details "as appropriate". Mokhtar Belmokhtar's death has been reported many times in the past.

HK arrests nine with explosives

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Hong Kong police arrested nine people and seized suspected explosives, authorities said yesterday, as the city goes on high alert ahead of a crucial vote on a China-backed electoral reform package that sparked widespread protests last year. The overnight raids involving scores of officers came three days after police warned they were monitoring on-line activity to track anyone planning to incite violence. Dozens were on patrol yesterday near government headquarters, where metal fences have been erected, before debate on the package begins tomorrow. The nine were arrested on suspicion of conspiracy to manufacture explosives, police said.

17 killed in battles near Iraq's Baiji refinery

REUTERS, Baghdad

Seventeen people were killed in Iraq yesterday in clashes between Islamic State militants and pro-government forces in Baiji close to the country's biggest refinery, a focal point in efforts to counter the ultra-hardline Sunni group. Fighting yesterday took place on a road used by Islamic State for supply lines leading from Baiji to the nearby town of Siniya to the west. Twelve militants, two government soldiers and three members of Shi'ite militias that provide vital support for the army were killed, a senior regional security official said.

MERS claims 16 in S Korea

BBC ONLINE

Another patient has died in South Korea amid an outbreak of the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome bringing total fatalities to 16. Officials also reported five new cases in South Korea, which has the largest outbreak outside the Middle East. Officials say 150 people have now contracted the virus in South Korea.



Pakistani camouflaged police commandos take part in anti-terrorism training during the passing-out ceremony of the Special Security Unit in Karachi yesterday. A batch of 2080 commandoes including 40 females graduated to be part of special security unit of the police, tasked to fight terrorism in the port city.

PHOTO: AFP

YEMEN CRISIS

Ban calls for truce

AFP, Geneva

UN chief Ban Ki-moon yesterday called for an immediate two-week humanitarian pause in Yemen to mark Ramadan as high stakes talks got underway in Geneva to try and end the bloody conflict.

International powers are keen for a speedy resolution, fearing the growing power of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, the Yemeni branch of the jihadist network which has taken advantage of the chaos to seize territory. "We do not have a moment to lose," Ban said, adding that the fighting was "giving strength to some of the world's most ruthless terrorist groups."

"I hope this week starts the beginning of the end of the fighting," Ban said.

"Ramadan begins in two days," he said, stressing that the holy Muslim month should be a period for harmony, peace and reconciliation.

"I have emphasised the importance of another humanitarian pause for at least two weeks," Ban

said, after meeting the government delegation.

Yemen has been wracked by conflict between Iran-backed Shi'ite rebels and exiled President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi's internationally recognised government which has "claimed more than 2,600 lives, half of them civilians," Ban said.

"Today, Yemen's very existence hangs in the balance," Ban said. While parties bicker, Yemen burns."

He also called on the warring factions to "reach agreement on local ceasefires, with the withdrawal of armed groups from cities."

Ban dismissed fears that the talks would be torpedoed by the non-arrival of an Iran-backed rebel delegation in time for the talks. The team's plane was delayed in Djibouti, according to UN and diplomatic sources.

He said the delay was due to logistical reasons and added: "I am pleased to know that the other parties are on their way" and were expected to arrive later yesterday.



'Migration is the symptom' of despair

AFP, Geneva

The multitude of migration crises facing the world are symptoms of a long line of brutal conflicts and rights violations, the UN rights chief said yesterday.

"Political turbulence, repression, violence and war have become so widespread that they impel many millions of the world's people to risk their lives to find a place of relative safety," said Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein.

"Migration is the symptom, the cause is despair, after repeated human rights violations have stripped an individual of all hope of justice and dignity," he told the opening of the UN Human Rights Council's June session.

More than 100,000 people have made the perilous journey across the Mediterranean to Europe so far this year, and some 1,800 have drowned trying. Southeast Asia's migrant crisis meanwhile unfurled at the start of May, leaving thousands from Bangladesh and Myanmar persecuted. Rohingya minority trapped at sea.

4,300 Pak, Afghan refugees get Indian citizenship

Plan in pipeline for '71 Bangladeshi refugee citizenships

THE HINDU ONLINE

The NDA government said yesterday it had granted citizenship to nearly 4,300 Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan and Afghanistan in its one year of being in power, nearly four times the number granted to such persons in the preceding five years under UPA-II.

According to officials in the government, this rapid increase in granting citizenships is in keeping with the BJP's stated aim of positioning India as a 'natural home' for Hindus fleeing persecution anywhere in the world, a policy similar to Israel's Law of Return that grants only Jews the right to return and settle there. This policy was outlined in the BJP's election manifesto for the 2014 Lok Sabha elections.

The Hindu had, in an exclusive report on 10 May, said the BJP government would soon submit to the Supreme Court a plan to grant citizenship to thousands of Hindu refugees from Bangladesh who had crossed over into India after 1971. This process would be simultaneous with the BJP's continued efforts to rid

India of 'infiltrators', a veiled reference to Muslims who crossed over from Bangladesh.

Officials say there are about two lakh Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan living in India. During the entire tenure of UPA-II, they said the total number of citizenships granted to such persons was only 1,023.

Ever since the Modi government assumed charge in May 2014, nearly 19,000 refugees have been given long-term visas in Madhya Pradesh, around 11,000 in Rajasthan and 4,000 in Gujarat, official sources said.

In April, the Home Ministry had rolled out an online system for Long Term Visa applications and for their processing by various agencies. The decision was taken to address the difficulty being faced by Hindu and Sikh minorities of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who had come with the intention of settling permanently in India. There are 400 Pakistani Hindu refugee settlements in cities such as Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Bikaner and Jaipur. Hindu refugees from Bangladesh mostly live in West Bengal and the northeastern States.



Pro-democracy campaigners stand in front of tents outside the city's legislature in Hong Kong yesterday, ahead of a key vote on the government's controversial political reform package. The controversial electoral roadmap, which lays out how Hong Kong's next leader should be chosen, goes for debate at the legislature tomorrow.

PHOTO: AFP

LALIT MODI ROW

Congress protests outside Sushma's house

THE HINDU ONLINE

The Aam Aadmi Party yesterday dragged the Prime Minister's Office into the raging row over External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj extending help to scam-tainted former IPL chief Lalit Modi alleging that "PMO may have been in the loop".

The opposition yesterday turned up the heat on the Centre and Sushma Swaraj over her "assistance" to Lalit Modi in obtaining British travel documents. The Congress staged a protest outside the Minister's house, demanding her resignation.

Bringing Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the line of fire, senior Congress leader Digvijay Singh said that "achhe din" appeared to have arrived for those accused in criminal cases—from Amit Shah, to Ramdev, to Lalit Modi. "ACHHE DIN for all accused of murder false encounter money laundering FEMA from Amit Shah to Ramdev to Lalit Modi. PM silent. ??? ????????", the Congress General Secretary said in a series of tweets.

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar yesterday accused the Centre of adopting double standard and questioned its commitment to rule of law going by the manner in which the NDA government, BJP and RSS have put up a united face to defend External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj in the Lalit Modi controversy.



government, BJP and RSS have closed ranks to defend Swaraj, it is clear that the BJP has a double standard in enforcement of rule of law against those people it likes and those it does not," he told reporters on the sidelines of Janata Durbar at the Chief Minister's official residence.

However, the Shiv Sena yesterday came out in support of External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, who is embroiled in a row over her "assistance" to Lalit Modi, and accused opposition of conspiring to destabilise the Narendra Modi government.

Earlier in the day, Congress National Spokesperson PL Punia said: "There are circumstances which establish contact between Sushma Swaraj and Lalit Modi. As a quid pro quo, Sushma Swaraj has done favour to a tainted person who is accused of Rs 700 crore money laundering, tax evasion and several other charges."

Sudan's Bashir flees S Africa

AFP, Johannesburg

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir fled out of South Africa yesterday, dodging a court order for him to stay as judges weighed up whether he should be arrested over alleged war crimes and genocide.

Bashir had travelled to Johannesburg for an African Union summit that was overshadowed by the International Criminal Court calling for him to be detained on long-standing arrest warrants over the Darfur conflict.

Even as his plane took off from Waterkloof military airport outside Pretoria, the local high court heard legal arguments over the application to force the authorities to arrest him.

On Sunday, Judge Hans Fabricius ordered authorities to stop Bashir from leaving the country after the Southern African Litigation Centre, a legal rights group, lodged its urgent case.

The president's hurried exit from South Africa appeared to be a violation of the court order, and it immediately sparked anger from rights' groups.

"(The) world stood (with) South Africa to fight apartheid but it stands for impunity for mass murder of Africans," Kenneth Roth, director of Human Rights Watch, said on Twitter.

"South Africa has shamefully flouted ICC and domestic court to free man wanted for mass murder of Africans," he added.

South Africa is a signatory of the ICC, which has often been criticised for only targeting Africa leaders.

"President Bashir's plane took off from Johannesburg and will arrive around 6:30 pm (1530 GMT)," State Minister for Information Yasir Yousef told AFP in Khartoum.

"Bashir will address the crowds that will gather to meet him."



Khaplang's deal changed rebel equation

HINDUSTAN TIMES

Burmese Naga rebel chief-tain SS Khaplang's truce with Myanmar's Thein Sein government in 2012 is believed to have reinvigorated northeast militant outfits that began losing steam after the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak Muivah (NSCN-IM) declared truce in July 1997.

The Myanmar government reportedly arranged Khaplang's transport from his base in northern Sagaing division to a Yangon hospital recently for treatment. This underscores the 2012 deal ensuring the safety of Khaplang's bases from attacks by the Tatmadaw (Burmese army) that reportedly, unlike Bhutan and Bangladesh, is not interested in chasing India rebels out.

For Khaplang, intelligence officials say, sheltering other groups serves a dual purpose. It generates revenue since the others pay to use his facilities and weapons, and gives him extra fighting hands against enemies.

8TH CENTENNIAL OF MAGNA CARTA

British royals mark anniversary

REUTERS, Runnymede

Britain's Queen Elizabeth led celebrations yesterday to mark 800 years since the sealing of the Magna Carta, one of the world's most significant historical documents and credited with paving the way for modern freedoms and human rights.

On June 15, 1215, in fields by the banks of the River Thames at Runnymede to the west of London, England's King John agreed to the demands of his rebelling barons and accepted the Magna Carta, Latin for "Great Charter", which for the first time placed the monarch under the rule of law.

In the centuries since, it has taken on huge global significance, becoming the basis for the US Bill of Rights, the US Declaration of Independence and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Three of its 63 clauses still remain on Britain's statute book.

"What happened in these meadows eight centuries ago is as relevant today as it was then. And that relevance extends far beyond Britain," British Prime Minister David Cameron said.

He said the document had changed the world, inspiring people from the founding fathers of the United States and Indian independence leader Mahatma Gandhi to Nelson Mandela in South Africa.

"Its remaining copies may be faded, but its principles shine as brightly as ever," Cameron told the ceremony attended by the queen, other royals and global figures



including US Attorney General Loretta Lynch.

Magna Carta came into being during a period of great political upheaval in England with conflict between King John, his nobles and the English church.

It was essentially a peace deal to address the problems of the day and was annulled by the pope shortly afterwards. But updated versions, which included two original clauses regarded as pivotal in establishing the rule of law, were released regularly by or on behalf of succeeding monarchs.

The clauses read: "No free man shall be seized or imprisoned, or stripped of his rights or possessions, or outlawed or exiled, or deprived of his standing in any way, nor will we proceed with force against him, or send others to do so, except by the lawful judgment of his equals or by the law of the land."

Jeb Bush ready to run for US presidency

AFP, Washington

With his campaign logo ready, Jeb Bush was set to make his big announcement yesterday, formally adding his name to the crowded Republican field for the 2016 US presidential election.

Bush, 62, has run a de facto race for six months, raising money and increasing his international profile, including a trip this week to Europe.

Following his speech in Miami, he will set about proving that although he comes from the Bush political dynasty, he is his own man with his own accomplishments to point to and ideas to offer.

On Sunday, his campaign released his logo: "Jeb!" in big red letters on a white background, with 2016 in smaller blue lettering underneath the name.

The family name is carefully avoided.

"I think the transition to a candidacy will allow me to be more direct about my advocacy of the leadership skills necessary for the next president to fix a few things," Bush told CNN in an interview aired Sunday.

"And as a candidate," he added, "I'll be more specific on policy."

A Bush campaign video lists reforms he made while governor of Florida from 1999 to 2007.

"The barriers right now on people rising up is the great challenge of our time," Bush says in the video.

Bush aims to break from the pack of potentially 15 or more Republican hopefuls by portraying himself as an experienced executive leader not tainted by Washington politics and the dysfunction that many Americans associate with politics as usual.

Hillary Clinton is the frontrunner on the Democratic side, with no current close competition.

